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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
(CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Initial reports of States parties

GEORGIA*

* This document has not been edited.

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INFORMATION SUBMITTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PRESENTATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS OF THE INITIAL REPORT OF GEORGIA ON THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

1. During the period since the submission by Georgia of its initial report on the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, our country has experienced changes that have affected major areas in the life of its people. For the most part, this relates to developments of an economic and, thus, a social nature, although the political situation has also undergone certain changes.

2. The financial crisis that has gripped most of the countries of the world since the second half of 1998 and has been particularly acute in Russia, has also had a severe impact on the post-Soviet States, and Georgia has not been spared major upheavals. The financial crisis and the ensuing budgetary crisis in our country resulted in a 50 to 70 per cent devaluation of the national currency, the lari, and, subsequently, a corresponding increase in prices for goods and services. The non-payment of wages and pensions, meagre as they were, to public sector workers and pensioners took on alarming proportions: in some parts of Georgia, payments were six months or more in arrears. By late 1998, the State owed approximately 90 million lari in wages and pensions, a debt carried over in its entirety to the 1999 budget. The country's budget for the current year was not adopted by Parliament until the end of March, making it significantly more difficult to solve the problem of liquidating the State's debts to the population. Taking into account the low level of fiscal discipline and tax collection, which has become a chronic malaise, the difficulties confronting the State are clear. Among the categories of workers who have found themselves in the most difficult position are doctors and teachers, the majority of whom, traditionally, are women. Moreover, a significant proportion of pensioners are also women.

3. No special funds have in fact been earmarked in the budget for the current year to address the problems affecting women. An exception is the US$ 70,000 invested, in the context of a cost-sharing arrangement, in the Women in Development project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The State has no additional funds at its disposal for carrying out the tasks set out in the plan of action which was to have been implemented with budget allocations by the relevant ministries, local authorities and State institutes. Attempts are being made to seek funding from other sources.

4. Promoting economic independence among women and increasing their participation in business is a long-term and complex process. When privatization was carried out in the country, women were not in a position to acquire any large-scale enterprises. At best, they are owners of small businesses in the services sector and have no possibility of obtaining substantial loans and so forth. Thus, there is a clear need for a special economic policy aimed at taking account of the gender factor in all its aspects. The time has come to elaborate a special State programme with a major component focusing on developing women's entrepreneurship.

5. Despite the situation prevailing in the country, which has not made it possible to carry out properly the tasks of achieving genuine equality between the sexes and promoting the advancement of women, it should be pointed out that certain steps are nevertheless being taken in this area. First and foremost, the protection of women's rights and freedoms is an integral part of human rights protection, which has become a general State priority in Georgia. Of vital importance in that regard is the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action - putting its recommendations into practice is considered to be an obligation in our country. The first step in that direction was the Presidential Decree No. 48 of 20 February 1998 on the Establishment of a Commission for the Elaboration of a State Policy on the Advancement of Women. The members of the Commission, which is headed by the Deputy Secretary for Human Rights Protection of the National Security Council of Georgia, include women who play a key role in the country's public and political life, of whom nine are representatives of non-governmental organizations.

6. On 18 June 1998, the President of Georgia issued a decree by which he approved the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women for the Period 1998-2000 elaborated in our country. This document covers the main problems affecting women, defines specific measures to be implemented and sets time-frames. The basic areas of work are reflected in the priorities set out in the Plan, which include:

- establishing institutional mechanisms for taking full account of women's concerns and mainstreaming them;

- increasing women's participation and strengthening their role in the decision-making process by enhancing their representation in power structures;

- an economic policy aimed at promoting women's economic self-sufficiency within a market economy;

- women and poverty (preventing a rise in the level of poverty among women during the transition period);

- women and armed conflicts, involving participation by women in the decision-making process and protection of women's rights;

- improving women's health by enhancing the health-care system for women as a whole and the most vulnerable groups in particular;

- women's rights, with the focus on improving legislation and preventing discrimination on the basis of gender.

The Plan is already being put into practice, although the economic difficulties referred to above may delay its full implementation.

7. The completion in 1998 of the joint project undertaken by the Georgian Government and UNDP, Women in Development, reflected the keen interest in and attention to women's problems manifested by the country's leaders.

8. The problem of women's under-representation at the decision-making level persists, although some progress has been made, even in comparison with the situation described in the report. At the present time, two ministries are headed by women: ecology and environmental protection, and trade and foreign economic relations. In the first local government elections in Georgia's post-independence history, 1,342 women (12.5 per cent) became deputies. While that is not many, the following fact warrants attention: one of the key posts in the Sakrebulo (legislative assembly) of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, is occupied by a woman. Moreover, Tbilisi, it should be pointed out, is home to almost one third of the country's population. One of the Deputy People's Defence Counsels of Georgia (ombudsmen) is a woman.

9. The issue of establishing, within the system of executive power, a department of women's affairs and corresponding structures in other governmental institutions has already been the subject of discussion by the country's senior leadership. The importance of putting in place such a department is not in dispute. However, budgetary problems making it impossible to take the necessary practical steps are impeding efforts to resolve this issue. At the same time, the question has not by any means been removed from the agenda: the country's leaders plan to establish a department of women's affairs after the presidential elections scheduled for April 2000.

10. Our most pressing concern remains the internal conflicts that have resulted in a vast number of displaced persons, most of them from Abkhazia, a sizeable majority of whom comprise vulnerable groups, which include women. The problem of repatriation has yet to be solved, and the State is shouldering a heavy burden. The presence of huge numbers of displaced persons has in turn given rise to a whole range of problems. As far as women are concerned, the primary need is to provide them with health care. As to the status of women in Abkhazia, one can say only that this region lies outside Georgia's de facto jurisdiction and that we have no mechanisms for protecting their rights or those of other Georgian citizens living in that territory.

11. As stated in the first annual report of the People's Defence Counsel of Georgia (Ombudsman) on the situation of human rights in the country in 1998, the transition to market relations has had a particularly strong impact on women. Thus, the total number of women employed in the public sector has fallen by 60 per cent, while the corresponding figure for men is 29 per cent. In education and health care, the difference in remuneration with regard to gender varies from 12 to 20 per cent, to the disadvantage of women; in construction, the figure is 300 per cent. According to data from the People's Defence Counsel, the average salary for women in the public sector is 26 lari, compared with 52.5 lari, or twice as much, for men. In the private sector, women's average monthly remuneration is 46.7 lari and men's 84.4 lari (a difference of more than 80 per cent). More striking still is the disparity among the self-employed, with women earning 46.91 lari and men 141.6 lari.

12. In 1997, 32 women died in childbirth in Georgia. In 1998, the figure was 37 (data of the People's Defence Counsel).

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GEORGIA

Corrigendum

Paragraph 12

For the existing text substitute

12. In 1998, 32 women died in childbirth in Georgia. In 1997, the figure was 37 (data of the People's Defence Counsel).

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